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Louisiana Territory, Winter, 1793.

THE STRANGERS CAME JUST BEFORE
DAWN, WHILE IT WAS STILL DARK.



THERE WERE NEAR THIRTY
MEN IN ALL, TRAVELING ON
HORSEBACK AND ON FOOT.

I CAUGHT SIGHT OF THE
PARTY WHILE IT WAS STILL
TOO FAR AWAY TO IDENTIFY.

STILL, AS SOON AS I SAW THEM, I
SOMEHOW KNEW MY FATE LAY WITH
THEM, AND THAT WHEN THEY LEFT,
I WOULD BE GOING WITH THEM.

AS THEY NEARED OUR HOME, I COULD SEE THE PARTY MORE CLEARLY. MOST OF THE MEN APPEARED SICKLY AND WORN, AS THOUGH THEY HAD ALREADY MADE A LONG AND DIFFICULT JOURNEY...

...ALL OF THEM EXCEPT FOR THE TWO MEN LEADING THE PARTY.

ONE DARK. ONE FAIR. BOTH APPEARED STRANGELY UNAFFECTED BY WHATEVER HARDSHIPS THEIR PARTY HAD FACED. EAGER, VIVACIOUS MEN. I WOULD SOON KNOW THEM AS EDWARD NORELL AND FRANKLIN BLACK.



AS THE PARTY NEARED OUR HOME, I WENT INSIDE AND WOKE MY HUSBAND.

WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL I HAD WANTED TO BE A WARRIOR, A HUNTER, A SCOUT.

BUT MY HUSBAND, ETIENNE, A TRAPPER FROM THE CANADAS, HAD BOUGHT ME FROM MY PEOPLE WHEN I WAS FIVE YEARS OLD, TO BE FIRST A SERVANT, THEN A WIFE...



...AND HE HAD BROUGHT ME TO THIS SMALL CABIN. I HAD NEVER KNOWN ANOTHER HOME.

AS THE PARTY APPROACHED, I FELT AN EXCITEMENT THE LIKES OF WHICH I HAD NEVER KNOWN, AN OLD SKIN FALLING AWAY. I FELT RAW AND NEW AND ALIVE.

HE HAD ALWAYS BEEN KIND TO ME. ALWAYS. AND YET...



THE TWO LEADERS INTRODUCED THEMSELVES AND EXPLAINED THAT THEY WERE PART OF AN EXPEDITION.

THEY HAD BEEN COMMISSIONED TO EXPLORE WHAT THEY CALLED "THE UNKNOWN EXPANSE OF THE NATION." I WOULD LATER DISCOVER THIS WAS NOT TRUE.

THEY WERE SEARCHING FOR A PASSAGE TO THE COUNTRY'S EDGE, IS HOW I UNDERSTOOD IT.

THEY HAD ALREADY COME NEARLY A THOUSAND MILES UPRIVER, AND NOW THAT THEY WERE NEARING LANDS INHABITED BY NATIVES, THEY WERE IN NEED OF A TRANSLATOR AND NEGOTIATOR.

MY HEART RACED AS THEY SPOKE.

IT WAS ALL I COULD DO TO CONTAIN MY EXCITEMENT WHEN THEY FINALLY INQUIRED ABOUT ME.

IN THE END, ETIENNE AGREED TO TRADE ME TO THEM FOR A HARPER'S FERRY MUSKET AND SOME TALLOW.

HE TOLD ME HE WOULD THINK OF ME EVERY DAY UNTIL I RETURNED.

BUT I KNEW WHEN I WALKED OUT THAT DOOR, I WOULD NEVER SEE HIM AGAIN.

AND THAT WAS ALL RIGHT.



AND SO IT WAS THAT WE SET OUT IN
THE EARLY SPRING OF THE YEAR 1794.



A PARTY OF EXPLORERS
LED BY CAPTAINS NORELL
AND BLACK, NONE OF US
KNEW WHAT LAY AHEAD.
NOT EVEN ME.



OF COURSE, I WOULD NEVER REVEAL
THIS TO THE CAPTAINS, BUT ETIENNE
HAD BOUGHT ME SO LONG AGO, THAT
I HAD FORGOTTEN WHAT LITTLE I
KNEW ABOUT THIS OPEN COUNTRY.



I KNEW THE LANGUAGE OF MY PEOPLE,
AND I WAS A SKILLED NAVIGATOR, BUT
EVEN SO, I WAS PRACTICALLY AS NEW
TO THIS LAND AS MY CAPTAINS.

STILL, I KEPT RECORDS OF
OUR PASSAGE, AND WAS AS
ATTENTIVE AS I COULD BE.

AND THE FARTHER WE TRAVELED, THE
GREATER THE DISCOVERIES WE MADE.



NEW SPECIES.



NEW WONDERS.

EVERYWHERE, REMINDERS OF THE GREAT
AND TERRIFYING MYSTERY OF THIS LAND.



AND YET...



OUR LEADERS SEEMED STRANGELY UNINTERESTED IN THE DISCOVERIES WE WERE MAKING.

IN FACT, THERE WAS LITTLE THAT CAUGHT THEIR ATTENTION BESIDES THE LAND'S ABUNDANT RESOURCES, WHICH THEY REMARKED ON FREQUENTLY...



AND HUNTING. THEY WOULD HUNT ALONE NEARLY EVERY EVENING, VENTURING OFF INTO THE WILDERNESS WITH ONLY THEIR MUSKETS AND KNIVES.

BUT THEY WOULD RETURN WITH GAME THAT IMPRESSED EVEN THE NATIVES IN OUR PARTY.



NOW I HAD HEARD LEGENDS OF CREATURES STALKING THESE LANDS-- MONSTERS CLOAKED IN HUMAN SKIN.

BUT STILL, I REFUSED TO BELIEVE THE CAPTAINS MIGHT BE ANYTHING OTHER THAN ECCENTRIC MEN.

BY OUR SEVENTH MONTH TOGETHER, THOUGH, THE EVIDENCE WAS BECOMING UNDENIABLE.



AND I FEARED THAT IF I DIDN'T LEAVE THE EXPEDITION SOON, MY LIFE WOULD BE IN DANGER.



AND YET EVEN SO, I HAD TO KNOW.



SO ONE NIGHT, I FOLLOWED THEM INTO THE WOODS, ON ONE OF THEIR HUNTING EXPEDITIONS.



AND WHAT
I SAW...



...WAS A
NIGHTMARE
COME TO
LIFE!

I TRIED TO RUN.





BUT THEY
WERE TOO
FAST.



I DID NOT EVEN
FEEL THE BITE.

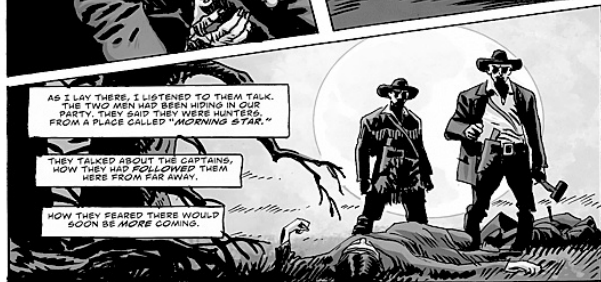
ALL I FELT WAS THE
SLOWING OF MY OWN
HEART, SLOWING,
SLOWING...UNTIL--

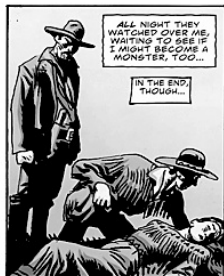


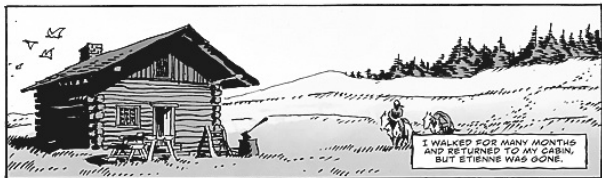
AS I LAY THERE, I LISTENED TO THEM TALK. THE TWO MEN HAD BEEN HIDING IN OUR PARTY. THEY SAID THEY WERE HUNTERS, FROM A PLACE CALLED "MORNING STAR."

THEY TALKED ABOUT THE CAPTAINS, HOW THEY HAD FOLLOWED THEM HERE FROM FAR AWAY.

HOW THEY FEARED THERE WOULD SOON BE MORE COMING.







I WALKED FOR MANY MONTHS
AND RETURNED TO MY CABIN,
BUT ETIENNE WAS GONE.



NOT LONG AFTER THAT, I TRIED
RETURNING TO THE SHOSHONE.
I WAS GREETED WARMLY.



WITHIN A WEEK, I HAD KILLED
EVERYONE IN MY TRIBE.

MOTHERS, CHILDREN.
EVERYONE. THEIR
BLOOD IN MY BELLY.



I WANDERED FOR
YEARS. HUNGRY. ALONE.
AVOIDING PEOPLE.

FINALLY, I FOUND THIS CAVE. I
CAME UP HERE, TO LIVE AWAY
FROM THE WORLD OF MEN.



AWAY FROM
EVERYTHING.







YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND--

OH, I UNDERSTAND. YOU WANT ME TO GET LOOSE THE THING I HAVE BECOME, THIS HUNGER, ON THE MEN YOU FIGHT.

NOT JUST THE MEN I FIGHT...FORGIVE ME, BUT YOU HAVE BEEN LOCKED AWAY IN THIS CAVE FOR MANY YEARS, AND IN THE TIME SINCE YOU WENT AWAY, OUR PEOPLE, NOT JUST THE APACHE, BUT YOUR PEOPLE, THE SHOSHONE, THE SIOUX, THE NEZ PERCE, THE LAKOTA, THE MOHAVE, THE OSSAWA...

ALL OF US, OUR PEOPLE HAVE BEEN RUN OFF OUR OWN LAND, PUSHED TO THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION. WE ARE A GREAT PEOPLE, BUT WE ARE STARVING BENEATH THE WHITE MAN'S PALM.



BUT WITH YOUR HELP, PLEASE...



IT WOULD NOT BE HELPING. IT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU WANT TO HEAR, BUT IT IS THE TRUTH.

CAN YOU IMAGINE HOW BADLY I WANT TO GO OUTSIDE? TO FEEL THE SUN ON MY SKIN? TO SEE THE SKY? TO EAT...



I AM STARVED... IN HERE...



SO EAT...

LISTEN TO ME, I HAVE FOUGHT MANY BATTLES, AND AFTER YEARS OF FIGHTING FOR SOME SEMBLANCE OF PEACE WITH OUR ENEMY, THIS IS WHAT I HAVE LEARNED.

THERE IS NO PEACE WITH THESE PEOPLE. IN FACT, THERE IS NO PEACE IN LIFE, ALL OF LIFE IS WAR, AND THERE IS NO DIGNITY IN WAR, ONLY SURVIVING.



Cavalry Encampment.







WE SUSPECT, SKINNER, SUSPECT. FOR ALL WE KNOW, THERE COULD BE A HANDFUL OF BRAVES. WORSE, THERE COULD BE WOMEN AND CHILDREN UP ON THAT GODDAM RIDGE.

WELL THAT'S LIFE THEN, ISN'T IT.

EVEN IF IT IS A HUNDRED STRONG UP THERE, YOU'D BE BURNING THEM ALIVE, SKINNER. YOU DON'T WANT THAT ON YOUR CONSCIENCE.



DON'T I NOW.



WE SIGNED UP FOR THIS, SKINNER. THERE'S A CODE OF HONOR.

LUCKY FOR ME THEN THAT I DON'T HAVE ANY HONOR.

SKINNER, THERE'S NO ONE I FEEL SAFER WITH BY MY SIDE. YOU'RE FEARLESS, ALWAYS HAVE BEEN.



I'M NOT AFRAID. NOT OF FIGHTING. NOT OF DYING. BELIEVE THAT. BUT I AIN'T ABOUT TO DIE FOR RULES OR CODES OF HONOR THAT DON'T ADD UP, AND MORE AND MORE, THAT'S WHAT THIS WORLD SEEMS ABOUT.

SO I'LL TELL YOU WHAT, MAYBE I HAVE MORE IN COMMON WITH THOSE SAVAGES UP THERE THAN I DO WITH HAWLEY AND HIS MEN.

BUT BURNING THE RIDGE OUT OF FEAR--

I WAS MADE AND RAISED IN WAR, JIMMY. I LIKE IT. IT'S HOME TO ME, AND WAR IS ALL IN OR ALL OUT.





WE WILL
KILL THEM
ALL!

THE

BEAST IN THE CAVE

PART 2

SCOTT SNYDER-WRITER JORDI BERNET-ARTIST

DAVE MICCANG-COLORS JARED K. FLETCHER-LETTERS COVER BY ALBUQUERQUE

JOE HUGHES-ASSISTANT EDITOR / MARK DOYLE-EDITOR

AMERICAN VAMPIRE CREATED BY SCOTT SNYDER AND RAFAEL ALBUQUERQUE

To be
Concluded...

AMERICAN VAMPIRE

MARK DOYLE EDITOR JOE HUGHES ASSISTANT EDITOR

AMERICAN VAMPIRE #20

Hello, American Vampire fans,

It's a gloomy Friday afternoon here in the Vertigo halls (although it's always a little gloomy around here, we kind of like it that way, don't we?). Joe is back from vacation (Welcome back, Joe!) and things are settling down, so I thought I would take some time to dip into the ol' mailbag. First up, a few letters about our amazing spin-off miniseries, "Survival of the Fittest." If you're not reading this miniseries, you should! Get out there and get it TODAY! It's a great stand-alone series, with incredible art by Sean Murphy, but it's also CRUCIAL to the AV mythos. So check it out! Okay, let's hear what you had to say:

Hey Mark (Doyle),

Please tell me you're working on plans to have Sean Murphy draw more American Vampire? AV:SOTF is pure WIN. Great writing, incredible art, and pitch-perfect storytelling. I know Sean is supposedly working on PUNK ROCK JESUS, but you have to get him back to AV.

Congrats on the Eisners to the whole AV team!

Later,

Phillip
Savannah, GA

Thanks for writing, Phillip. I agree that Sean has been incredible on AV:SOTF. (Funny how that abbreviation caught on. I once saw someone tweet that this title is the most non-twitter-friendly title ever. He might be right.) Sean is indeed working on PUNK ROCK JESUS (In stores 2012! Get ready because it's going to be awesome!) And when Sean's done with that...well, I cannot say yet. Sorry. But there are plans, plans, so many plans...

Dear Editor:

I want to let you know I really enjoyed AMERICAN VAMPIRE: SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST #4 and look forward to its conclusion. Mr. Snyder continues to provide great historical background on vampires, and these latest vampires are nothing short of fantastic.

I also wanted to let you know I enjoy Mr. Murphy's art so much that I picked up JOE THE BARBARIAN and can't wait to read it. :)

After this story concludes, I hope to see more of Cash and Felicia real soon. I think they're too great to be left to two stories, but that's just me. :)

Thank you,

Nick (dcfan4ever)
Long Island, NY

Thanks, Nick. And thanks for picking up Sean's other work. I think you'll enjoy it. We love Cash and Felicia too. After "Devil in the Sand" we knew they had more story to tell, and once the idea of a miniseries got kicked around, they seemed to be the perfect pair to star in it. And don't worry, more plans for them too...

Nick also sent us another letter with a question:

...While I am greatly enjoying "Ghost War" in AMERICAN VAMPIRE, I do have one question. The Taipan vampires greatly resemble the vampires in the movie "Priest." Did the movie have some influence on Mr. Albuquerque's depiction of the Taipan vampires, or is this a coincidence?

Pure coincidence. Rafael started designing those vamps back in fall of 2010 after we discussed it at last year's New York Comic Con. "Priest" came out in May of this year. Although the creative team on "Priest" was probably working on their designs while Rafael was developing his, we never saw it until spring like the rest of the world. Something in the air, I guess.

All right, let's hear from another fan...

Dear Mark,

Death is notoriously nonpermanent in comics. However, I hope Skinner Sweet's death sticks. Don't get me wrong—Skinner is a compelling character, and he has been a cornerstone of the series from the beginning. But his confrontation with Pearl on Taipan was intense and poignant, and his death unexpected. I believe that Skinner would have been disappointed had his demise come from anyone other than Pearl. AMERICAN VAMPIRE has built an intriguing world with many interesting characters, and I hope that the series will honor Skinner's legacy by showcasing other American vampires as the series continues (although untold tales of Skinner's past are always welcome).

Reed Beebe
Kansas City, MO

Thanks for the thoughtful note, Reed. I take this as a real compliment to the series that you think AMERICAN VAMPIRE can succeed even if we don't have Skinner at the center of all things, making life miserable for everyone around him. We were all pretty shocked by Skinner's death around here (I know that Scott even surprised himself with how things went down) and I can't tell you yet how things are going to turn out, but I think you'll be very surprised and happy with what we have planned.

Dear Mark and the whole AMERICAN VAMPIRE team,
 Just wanted to say a BIG well done on the conclusion of "Ghost War." I was seriously impressed and surprised. Can't wait to see where the book will go next and what the future holds for Pearl and Henry.
 Roll on issue 19!!!

Wil Trainor
 Wigan, England

Thanks, Wil! And speaking of rolling on, we're on it! Knee deep in "Beast in the Cave" now. How about this "Lost Tale"? Don't know about you guys, but I'm loving the hell out of this story. Send us letters and let us know what you think!

And up next! The conclusion of "Beast in the Cave." Don't want to give too much away, but I can tell you this: there will be blood!!!

- Mark

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DC Comics

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AMERICAN VAMPIRE #21



VERTIGO

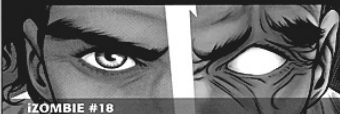
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THE HOTLIST



THE UNEXPECTED #1

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IZOMBIE #18

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ON THE

LEDGE

I landed in the world of comics somewhat by chance.

I had studied literature, and I always dreamed of writing, but I never imagined I'd become a comic book author. It's all thanks to Sylvain. Before meeting him, I didn't really read comics (I must have read *Tarzan* when I was 13, and my next comic book was *Blue Pills* by Frederik Peeters when I was 23). Stupidly, I believed that comics were for children, for men who refused to grow up or for people who didn't like to read very much. In Poland, where I was born, no one tried to change my mind. There, during my childhood, comics were a marginal art form. Thanks to Sylvain, I plunged into comics not only as a reader but almost simultaneously as an author. The *MARZI* adventure started in 2005.

In the beginning, I struggled with my role. I was always hiding behind Sylvain who had an established career as a comics artist. He's the one who carried *MARZI* on his shoulders for several years. But little by little, with the publication of each new volume, I learned (and I'm still learning) to better manage my work as scriptwriter, and my place in this world became more stable. I began to understand the importance of my work. It wasn't by chance. Not anymore. And I didn't want to be the author of only one comic book.

One day, I met a Polish illustrator: Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz. I liked his drawings a lot, and I wanted to work with him. At the time, I was in the midst of reading the poems of a Polish poet who wrote about the war. A few of them referenced the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.

This uprising is often confused with the uprising of the Warsaw ghetto in 1943. It was the last hope, the last attempt—powerful and at the same time desperate—of the Polish people to regain their freedom from the Nazis. It was expected to last 4 or 5 days, but it ended after 63 days. It was a true death knell to Warsaw. The Red Army had arrived on the outskirts of the city, and halted near the Vistula River, waiting for the Germans and the Poles to kill each other. Then, they arrived as the victor in the lifeless capital, and established communism. The Russians, thanks to their non-intervention, kept that historic event in the shadows (and made sure it stayed there) which is why it barely exists in Western minds.

The uprising isn't an easy topic. It's vast and has always stirred up a number of controversies about its meaning. But it's a real-life story that needs to be told, and it will be the subject of my next comic, working with Krzysztof. It's a huge job for us and a terrific challenge that we have thrown ourselves into with great enthusiasm.

I don't know if, working on another project that once again takes the history of Poland as its subject, I run the risk of being categorized as a Polish author. But at the same time, I know I have many other interesting stories in my bottom drawer that aren't necessarily about Poland, but in which no doubt my Polish sensibility, my Polishness, shines through. It's something I'll never escape, but I also don't want to escape it. It's where I find my strength. And for me, for now, it feels vital to write about my country.

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MARZENA SOWA is the author of *MARZI*, a graphic novel on sale October 19th. Told from a young girl's perspective, this compelling coming-of-age memoir portrays the harsh realities of life behind the Iron Curtain while maintaining the everyday wonders and curiosity of childhood. With open and engaging art by Sylvain Savoia.